

## Introduction

*POGROM IN GUJARAT IS A STUDY* of an anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, India, that began on February 28, 2002, and lasted for three days—approximately seventy-two hours. Officials rationalized the violence as a reaction—*pratikriya*—to the aggression of its victims. In the city of Ahmedabad and in Gujarat’s central provinces, a state of exception ruled for approximately three weeks. Several mass killings were followed over a few months by many instances of violence on a lesser scale. Muslim homes and religious structures were desecrated and destroyed; Muslim commercial establishments were boycotted. Countless flyers circulated, appealing to Hindus to awake to the essence of who they were—and many did. For weeks on end, a curfew was put into effect in select areas of Ahmedabad and other cities. When it was over, 150,000 individuals had been driven from their homes and more than 1,000 people lay dead, the majority of whom were Muslims.<sup>1</sup> Many Muslims understand the pogrom to have lasted much longer than three days and, instead, still today insist it lasted anywhere from six weeks to three months. Central Gujarat did not return to normalcy until spring 2003, which coincided with my departure from the scene after eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork. Despite its severity and some singular aspects of its organization, the pogrom resembled similar events experienced by previous generations in Ahmedabad and elsewhere at the end of the 1960s, 1980s, and the 1990s (RCR; Sheth and Menon 1986; Spodek 1989; Nandy et al. 1995: 104–107, 110–123; Breman 2003: 253–262; 2004: 221–231; Shani 2007: 77–132, 156–188; Kumar 2009: 80–215).

A pogrom is an event driven by words and images, as much by the associations and invocations that precede it as by those that accompany it. The enactment of the Gujarat pogrom followed a script collectively shared on the streets and in media representations. In the chapters that follow, I examine the forms of complicity that the pogrom demanded and the quotidian understandings it engendered. While many of these understandings seem to be recurrent instances of collective violence, I focus only on events of 2002 and seek to unravel the specific cultural and psychological processes of individual and collective identification that

## 2 • Introduction

were then prevalent in central Gujarat. The extant literature about the pogrom, I will argue, insufficiently understands and inadequately takes into account these processes.

While I had completed an ethnographic study in a Gujarati village by the mid-1990s, I began field research in urban Ahmedabad in 1999. At that time, most residents of the city I spoke to insisted that this thing called “politics” was ultimately responsible for past outbreaks of violence in the city. By politics (*rajakaran*), reckoning with the causes and purposes of power, they meant the inherently corrupt and profoundly immoral political theater of all violent altercations. By contrast, following the pogrom in 2002, many non-Muslim residents explained the violence as an extralegal collective punishment of a recalcitrant Muslim minority by the Hindu majority, conceived of as “the people.” By 2009, while some Hindu-identified residents continued to hold this view, others had softened their stand. Many acknowledged Muslim victimization but nonetheless insisted that events in 2002 had been overblown in the national and international media, giving the state a bad name.

By 2009, many Muslim residents I knew, though still holding to an understanding of themselves as the primary victims of the pogrom, were no longer eager to hold any political party, civic institution, or individual accountable for the violence. Some even preferred the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—which has been in rule this entire time—outright above the Congress Party because, in the words of one interlocutor, “They will stab you from the front not from the back.” Such a cynical apprehension of the mechanics of political representation is nothing new in the state and, some argue, had already obtained in the 1990s (G. Shah 2003b: 231).

Many Muslims also acknowledged the state government’s successes for bringing economic development in the intervening years to Gujarat, which it has subsequently made central to its legitimation. Many still agreed that the events in 2002 had been “politics,” which means to say that the ruling political party had instigated the pogrom in order to counter a downward trend in support, as it had lost the state’s *gram panchayat* elections in 2001 and then the assembly by-elections in early 2002. But by 2009, the rule of the BJP in the state had stabilized, and Muslims were secure—for a while. Accordingly, although the pogrom had been part of a timely political calculation, many people claimed that because it was ultimately predictable, they could at least reckon with it.

In these understandings, a cyclical pattern of violence with a recurrent rationalization is apparent. The way of least resistance is the relegation of all violence to an amorphous “politics”, the common denominator with which all—Hindu or Muslim, Dalit or Vaniya—will agree. Speaking transparently about past experiences with violence risks summoning a past that still vividly lurks in the present. Such interpretations elide the

more disturbing realization that not only do political parties manipulate constituencies for electoral gain, but people themselves become complicit in this by inhabiting representations, participating in acts and thoughts that have effects beyond the mere political calculations of those who organize for violence. The political machinations of the pogrom reveal only half of the story.

The other half is the focus of this study. How was the chief minister of Gujarat able to mobilize city residents psychologically for violent action while, at the same time, extricating the political from the event? How were vernacular print media successful in deploying phantasmal material despite city residents' profound experiences with earlier rounds of violence? How did specific members of lower and middle classes inhabit these representations, and how did their identifications relate to local practices of nonviolence, sacrifice, and disgust? How do contemporary forms of identification relate to the state's most famous figure, Mahatma Gandhi? How is violence anchored in the urban hardware of a city whose spatial configuration is profoundly scarred by violent experiences? And, last, what is the peculiar logic of inclusive exclusion as it revolves around the inherent instability of the categories "Hindu" and "Muslim" evoked in the pogrom?

## HINDU NATIONALISM AND GUJARAT

While Gujarat has traditionally been and is still today one of India's most prosperous states, urban areas such as Ahmedabad have been the scenes for flashes of serious communal conflagrations for a very long time. After Indian Independence in 1947 and the formation of the state of Gujarat in 1960, Ahmedabad, its largest city, emerged as "one of the most violent prone urban areas in all of India" (Varshney 2002: 220). In Ahmedabad, collective violence is indeed endemic.<sup>2</sup>

Recurrent events of what is frequently called "ethnic" or "communal" violence in modern India bring to the fore complex problems inherited from the various empires that have refigured the South Asian continent. Hence recent territorial displacements and population movements often remind historians of the familiar themes that form the detritus of modern South Asian history: Orientalism, colonialism, partition, war, nationalism, social movements, ethnic and religious conflict, and global networks of trade and brutality of every imaginable sort. Academics from political science and sociology have largely focused on issues and ailments such as environmental exploitation, labor migration, communalism, the nuclear threat, and the contradictory effects of democratization and new state formation.

These macro themes certainly are not to be neglected. The anthropological contribution here, however, is to show how their significance is inflected locally by the experiences of more immediate and intimate concerns, such as upward mobility, ambivalence towards a symbolic father, marriage and sexuality, culinary practices and dietary disinvestments, the disappearance and transformation of traditional styles of worship, and the experience of social stigma in urban space. As my research places strong emphasis on ethnographic exposition, for reasons I will explain below, experiences are situated in multiple geopolitical and temporal scales.

Gujarat is unique within India. The state harbors a strong regional identity, which culminated in the establishment of a separate territorial entity in 1960 (Yagnik and Sheth 2005: 226–228; Ibrahim 2009: 13–31). It is today also known as the “laboratory of Hindutva” with a self-chosen role of vanguard for India as a whole. The term *Hindutva*—Hindu-ness (literally, the essence of the Hindu)—is commonly translated as “Hindu nationalism.” Hindutva has become a reference point for political articulation in Gujarat at least since the late 1980s and early 1990s, but its activity in the state reaches much further back (G. Shah 1993: esp. 196; A. M. Shah 2002b).

Hindu nationalism initially emerged before Independence in western India as an upper-caste ideology with universal scope. It held an ambiguous relationship to traditional Hindu worldviews and practices as well as to the West. While it opposed British colonialism, it simultaneously sought to emulate the West and was in favor of rapid modernization (Jaffrelot 1996 [1993]: 11–79; Hansen 1999: 79–80). Mahatma Gandhi, the recognized symbolic father of modern India, epitomized an oppositional relationship both to Western modernity and to Hindu nationalism. He was, indeed, assassinated in 1948 by a Hindu nationalist, an identification that Gandhi referred to as placing them among “the moderns.” Although he considered himself an orthodox Hindu, Gandhi rejected this form of nationalism because it channeled colonial subjugation as a form of mawkish innocence to authorizing violent expression, which he vehemently opposed (Bhatt 2001: 83).

Promulgated most succinctly by the revolutionary nationalist Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in the 1920s, Hindutva ideology ascribed a notion of nationhood to Aryan and non-Aryan peoples on the subcontinent. These peoples would form a single Hindu nation (*hindu rashtra*) that included members of diverse castes and religious communities such as Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs, while excluding Muslims and Christians (Savarkar 2005 [1928]: 113). Influenced by European writers such as the English evolutionist sociologist Herbert Spencer, the German Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel, the French race theorist Arthur Comte de

Gobineau, and the Italian revolutionary nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini, Savarkar proposed definitions of Hindu-ness based on territory, race, culture (understood as civilization—*sanskriti*), and strong affective ties (Bhatt 2001: 79–94).

In Savarkar's influential formulations there is an important omission: religion. Although he found it important to emphasize an inclusive Hindu identity in order to encompass the many sectarian traditions that constituted the category "Hinduism," he programmatically passed over *particular* traditions—differences, which, many argue, are the essential defining feature of Indian cultural traditions—in favor of nonreligious, affective, territorial, and racial belongings. While Savarkar demoted religion and belief with one stroke, as Bhatt (2001: 85) has written, he curiously reintroduced the concept in order to exclude Muslims and Christians from a definition of national belonging. This contradictory tension in Savarkar's writing was never resolved, and it remains essential for contemporary followers of Hindutva in Gujarat or elsewhere.

Curiously, Savarkar mentions three Muslim communities that have special ties to Gujarat: the Bohra, the Memon, and the Khoja. For Savarkar, notwithstanding that the practices of these communities are examples of the mutual imbrication of local cultures with Hindu society, he uses them as argumentative linchpins to drive home their nonmembership in the Hindu nation (Savarkar 2005 [1928]: 98, 101–102, 115). This line of argument can still be heard today. There is, on the one hand, a clear acknowledgment, especially by Hindu nationalists in the state, that Gujarati Muslims are influenced by local cultural styles and segmented into many diverse communities. On the other hand, Hindu nationalists' constant barrage of accusations nonetheless targets an indigestible core that renders Muslims external to the state, and by extension, to India. This study examines this core, which renders an internally divided minority simultaneously unified and external.

In addition, Savarkar's formulation of Hindutva inscribed notions of fatherland (*pitrabhumi*) and "Holyland" (*punyabhumi*) that became territorially and culturally defined (Andersen and Damle 1987: 33–34). The notion of fatherland was coupled with the simultaneous notion of motherland (*matrubhumi*), the former associated with paternal descent and the latter with place of birth (Savarkar 2005 [1928]: 110). Although Muslims and Christians relate to India as their country of birth as well as the country of descent, they could never understand it as their "Holyland," the country of origin of their religious traditions (Bhatt 2001: 94–99).

For Muslims or Christians, the coincidence of birth, descent, and civilization with an Indian "Holyland" was not possible. Due to this fact, whatever they shared with Hindus in common culture, they would always be divided in their love for the mother country (Savarkar 2005

[1928]: 113). An Oedipal theme can be identified here, an implicit assumption that without divine origins, one risks betrayal of the country. Addressing Indian Muslims, Savarkar suggests:

Ye, who by race, by blood, by culture, by nationality possess almost all the essentials of Hindutva and had been forcibly snatched out of our ancestral home by the hand of violence—ye, have only to render wholehearted love to our common Mother and recognize her not only as Fatherland (*Pitribhu*) but even as a Holyland (*punyabhū*); and ye would be most welcome to the Hindu fold. (Ibid.: 115)

There is here a strong need to define an origin that remains unscathed and undivided. Directing attention elsewhere, even if only in part or temporarily, betrays the perfection of that wholeness. Only if all is rendered to the “common Mother”—descent, birth, and belief—can there be a unity between father, mother, and divinity that promises the absence of division. That said, Hindu nationalism is not simply about cultural homogeneity, though it seems to privilege this, but, as in Savarkar’s formulations, it is about father, mother, deity—a congruity between unstable elements that risk becoming unhinged from one another.

## ORGANIZING UNITY

Notwithstanding its elite ideology, Hindu nationalism quickly understood the need to unify diverse segments of Indian society by, for example, including untouchables as “true” Hindus (Andersen and Damle 1987: 28–29; Zavos 2000: 87–98). Social division was seen as one of the causes for Hindu ineffectualness, a constitutional cowardice when opposing enemies in the present and in the past: the colonial humiliation by a handful of British foreigners, the losses through religious conversion or clashes, and the waves of invading armies that were seen as having penetrated into the subcontinent for millennia.

In the 1920s, several organizations, among them the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (Organization of National Volunteers, or RSS), experimented with political ideologies and organizational models that have since become constitutive for the practices of Hindu nationalism. This period saw the sustained anticolonial mass mobilization of the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, who promulgated a complex set of nonviolent methodologies in order to wrench national Independence from the British (Spodek 1971). During this formative period, also, Hindu-Muslim violence flared up all over India, although the particular groups, castes, and communities involved showed much regional variation. Founded by Keshav Baliram

Hedgewar in 1925 and later continued by Madhav Sadashi Golwalkar, the RSS initially portrayed itself successfully as an organization that protected Hindus during communal violence, a claim it also later made during Partition (Zavos 2000: 186–187).

The first RSS *shakha* (branch) in Gujarat began its activities in 1938 (Andersen and Damle 1987: 38).<sup>3</sup> Banned for approximately one year in 1948 for its alleged involvement in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the organization was acquitted in 1949 and resumed its activities nationwide. Over the years, many other organizations began to be formed that owe their origin to the RSS. They specialize in various activities such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council, or VHP), founded in 1964 as a cultural and religious branch of the RSS, and its militant youth wing, the Bajrang Dal, founded in 1984. As civic institutions with an extremist anti-Muslim rhetoric, both played a paramount role in the 2002 violence. Realizing the increasing importance of a public political face, in early 1950 the RSS launched the Jan Sangh, a political party whose aim was the establishment of a Hindu nation with a human touch (Hansen 1999: 84–86). Initially unsuccessful, its appeal nonetheless rose markedly in Gujarat in the 1960s (Kumar 2009: 91).

During the crises of governance in the 1970s, the Jan Sangh began changing its electoral strategy by addressing landless laborers, small peasants, urban working classes, students, and small entrepreneurs (Andersen and Damle 1987: 182–186). Background for these changes were conflicts over reservation—that is, policies of protective discrimination (affirmative action)—for lower and backward classes. At the end of the 1970s, an electoral strategy pursued by Congress-I called the KHAM formula promulgated a caste configuration consisting of a combination of Kshatriya (large cluster of castes), Harijan (Dalit groups), Adivasi (tribal groups), and Muslims, thus displacing elites—Brahmins, Vaniyas, and especially the Patidars (Patels)—from access to political power in Gujarat (Sanghavi 2010: 488).

In 1985, the Congress Party won the Gujarat assembly elections through this strategy. While the conflict over reservation and the new electoral formula had successfully displaced traditional elites from political power in the state, tensions culminated in the 1985 violence in Ahmedabad. Curiously, however, although it was spurred by an agitation against state policies over reservation, after a month the violence against Dalits turned anti-Muslim (Sheth and Menon 1986). As Shani (2007: 105) has argued in a detailed case study, the 1985 violence was an expression of how caste cleavages then began providing the backdrop for “an all-Hindu communal consolidation,” a strategy that finally began to bear fruit. The conjunction of these two types of structural tension—upper versus lower castes and classes as well as Hindu versus Muslim—came

to the fore in the Gujarat pogrom of 2002 without in any way resolving these issues for the future.

In 1980, the Jan Sangh was renamed the Bharatiya Janata Party. After growing anti-BJP feeling among Dalits because of the party's earlier anti-reservation stance, the VHP reversed the oppositional trend by including Dalits as well as Adivasi in cultural-awakening programs (Nandy et al. 1995: 103–105). Dalit youth in Ahmedabad were recruited into the Bajrang Dal and put in charge of organizing neighborhood festivals and meetings (G. Shah 2006: 83). In the tribal belt of Gujarat, the VHP and other Hindu organizations inaugurated programs to oppose Christian conversion and to “Gujaratize” and “Hinduize” tribal groups, including attempts at social assimilation (Lobo and Das 2006: 90, 118–120). The division of labor between the organizational work of the RSS, the grassroots work of the VHP, the violent labor of the Bajrang Dal, and the political work of the BJP has become a routine strategy today. No comparable institutional framework exists for Muslims in Gujarat.

The late 1980s also saw the first beginnings of the Ramjanmabhumi movement for the installation of a Hindu temple dedicated to the epic god Ram in the town of Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, on the site of a former mosque. This campaign, which pitted Hindus and Muslims against one another nationwide, is the most successful Hindu nationalist campaign to date. It was designed to unify social categories as Hindus in order to counter the splintering forces that the conflict over reservation had unleashed. The mosque was finally destroyed by an organized mob in December 1992, triggering serious reverberations throughout India.

In 1995, the BJP became the strongest political force in Gujarat, developing into the state's most successful champion of Hindu nationalism. In 1998, the BJP also emerged as strongest political party in the Lok Sabha in Delhi. During the period 1998 to 2004, the state government of Gujarat was in the unique position to share a political agenda with influential members of the central government coalition in New Delhi, which had formed the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). One of the long-term successes of the backroom travails by the RSS in this period was the infiltration of government, administration, and the police forces in the state (Bunsha 2006: 36, 57–65).

In sum, as a political project in Gujarat today, Hindutva presents formidable possibilities. It offers an interpretation of Hinduism that unites upper and lower caste and class groups as “Hindus,” a historical subject threatened by Islam and Christianity. In this way, it provides a historical rapprochement for untouchability by displacing and channeling antagonism into nationalist registers. It portrays Hindus as victims of an aggression that demands a response. Although Hindu nationalist rhetoric drives the rejection of Muslims, its regional implementation relies on local specificities connected to meanings and identifications peculiar to the state.

## POGROM AND COMPLICITY

A pogrom, as I am construing it, is a communal sacrifice, a cleansing device to make a portion of one's own society into sacrificial victims. It requires logistical planning and preparation, and its successful execution relies on support from the state apparatus, including the police and criminal actors, but also on spontaneous and vicarious forms of participation by groups or sets of ordinary citizens in active and passive capacities. Specific targets have to be located and marked, resistances be overcome through intimidation and propaganda, and regional, national, and international registers be invoked.

In this, a pogrom is easy to distinguish from a riot. It is not a serendipitous event but a planned one, characterized by a specific kind of collective consciousness that makes forms of complicity possible. A pronounced blurring of boundaries between state, movement, and people is characteristic of fascist mobilizations everywhere (Marcuse 2007 [1947]: 92–111). Following the work of Kakar (1995: 51), Brass (2003: 30–34, esp. 32), and Das (2007: 205–211), the question is how the planning and spontaneous action become linked in the collective understanding of events *by those in whose name the violence is perpetrated*.

Pogroms entail not only acquiescence to acts of violence but also are followed by psychological denials. Participants who partake in the emotional rage that is mobilized by key actors and organizations often share a profound belief in their own innocence during the events and are therefore later incapable or unwilling to support legal retribution and redress, resulting in moral impunity for the perpetrators. During the events, the explanation of karmic reaction—a generalized “angry Hindu” wreaking vengeance against the phantasmagoric figure of the Muslim—was paramount.

Hindu residents of Ahmedabad at the time of the pogrom explained to me that in their view, the Modi government obviously had no other choice than to allow the eruption to take its course. Otherwise, it would have been dealing in “politics.” If such explanations obfuscate the agency of political and civic actors, they also inscribe the people as the collective agent of violence in the realization of their potential. Even relatively uninvolved members of a majority community are cast into supportive roles by compelling them to engage in defensive postures and, later, elaborate denials. In this way, pogroms exhibit a marked tendency to produce their own rationalizations: the psychological and symbolic inscription becomes “explanation” for division afterwards.

All these forms of complicity rely on means that scholars of Eastern European pogroms, such as Jan Gross (2001: xv), call the “institutionalization of resentment.” Collective mobilization of resentment cannot be created *ex nihilo* but must resonate with local, intimate themes already in

place. The slippage between a mythical violence rendered legitimate during its unfolding while denigrated as “politics” afterwards was possible through the work of an elaborate array of stereotypes that configure the Muslim locally. In contemporary Gujarat, the specific elements that serve as the basis for forms of resentment are linked to a sacrificial logic.

For me as a German national only three generations removed from the Holocaust and the Second World War, violent collective phenomena such as pogroms carry a peculiar resonance. Nazi crimes included orchestrated pogroms that were long a part of European history. Yet, still today, many aspects of the National Socialist policy that were successfully deployed to cleanse Europe of its Jews seem to defy explanation. The fact that many ordinary Germans affirmed, in various direct and indirect ways, the Nazi government’s racist policies and genocidal practices continues to puzzle scholars.

Analysis of Nazi crimes has given much attention to forms of complicity and has developed concepts such as *Schreibtischtäter*, which depicts bureaucratic complicity in sitting at one’s office desk and attending to (minor) state functions while other state employees engage in mass murder. Such concepts have entered everyday speech in the German language. Likewise, much analysis has focused on the relation of anti-Semitic notions in traditional folklore and identifications to active and passive toleration for persecution of one’s neighbors (Grunberger and Dessuant 2000 [1997]: 460–480). Today in Germany, there is widespread agreement that responsibility rests not only with those actively giving or passively executing orders but also with residents who remained silent or inactive. Several generations of postwar Germans have worked hard to overcome collective resistance to acknowledging forms of agency in acquiescent roles.

This is not the case in Gujarat. For me, the single most disturbing experience during the violence in Gujarat was not the complicity of politicians and orchestrations of large parts of the state machinery but the psychological *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) of “ordinary” Gujaratis with whom I was acquainted. There are many reasons for the often temporary inability to distance oneself emotionally and intellectually from the revengeful rhetoric of violence during its unfolding. But complicity and disavowal were too pervasive to be ignored. As Hannah Arendt pointed out, in 1933 when Hitler came to power in Germany, many of her friends fell prey to their own intellectual fabrications—“*Sie gingen Ihren eigenen Einfällen in die Falle*” (They fell into the trap of their own ideas).<sup>4</sup> I describe and investigate some of these traps in Ahmedabad, the ways individuals personally invested emotions in ideas and political events and found reasons for their legitimacy.

## POGROM, SACRIFICE, AND AHIMSA

There are also parallels between WWII German complicity and contemporary Gujarati complicity related to the logic of sacrifice. The ideology of National Socialism was based on appeals to notions of collective victimhood and sacrifice (both rendered as *Opfer*) applied to the people (*Volk*), who, if properly led by the *Führer*, could by default never be defeated (Geyer 2002). Conceptions of “the people” lie at the foundation of notions of sovereignty of all modern political systems, totalitarian and democratic alike. As Lefort (1986: 292–306) has stressed, the totalitarian impulse toward unity was a response to problems within democratic political form itself, in which division is overcome through an invocation of the People-as-One. In contemporary India—a postcolonial society and the world’s largest democracy—arriving at a united people requires a rearticulation of the relationship of victim to sacrifice.

In classic anthropological literature, sacrifice is understood as a structural principle of rites of initiation, rituals that regenerate and transform the social, and it is understood as a means to displace aggressive impulses onto scapegoats (cf. W. Smith 1889: 244–324; Frazer 1960 [1890]: 348–386; Hubert and Mauss 1964 [1899]; Durkheim 1995 [1912]; 330–354; Evans-Pritchard 1956: 197–286). Its symbolic technologies include expiation and incorporation, consecration and profanation, as well as substitution and mimesis. All sacrificial procedures compel some form of loss—at its most extreme, physical death, which is then recuperated by reconstituting a new entity or by marking a new beginning.

Sacrifice belongs to a general theory of economy and exchange, as both Simmel (1989 [1900]: 55–92) and Bataille (1992 [1949]: 45–77; 1991: 43–61) have insisted. It is an act of regenerative expenditure involving destruction and abnegation as well as its inverse, an act of production and symbolic appropriation. The loss in sacrifice, the expenditure accrued, has the objective of accessing some form of value, permanence, transcendence, or recovery of a lost vitality (Bloch 1992: 24–45). This insight is especially pertinent when the constitution of a loss compels killing. When regeneration is understood as an act of annihilation, sacrifice can become a means for the ritual control of death, or its failure, which, if unacknowledged, can wreak havoc and lead to terrible consequences (Siegel 2006: 1–26).

Sacrificial violence in India is closely linked to the doctrine of ahimsa (nonviolence), initially not an ethic of nonviolence but a protective technique against the effects of the necessary violence in ritual—namely, the ritual of sacrifice. The meanings of ahimsa have continually shifted through three millennia. With roots in the Vedic sacrificial complex,

ahimsa became an ethical ideal for behavior only with the emergence of a doctrine of renunciation, which implied a transformation and departure from, and even a severe critique of, ancient Brahmin ritualism (Alsdorf 1962; Schmidt 1968; Heesterman 1984; 1993: 34–34, 79–83; Biardeau 1989 [1981]: 30–32; Gonda 1959: 95–117; Fuller 1992: 57–82; Vidal, Tarabout, and Meyer 2003 [1994]: 11–26, 85–104).

During the Gujarat pogrom, people invoked the symbolic technologies of killing and sacrifice metaphorically, and they enacted them in situ on three interconnected levels. First, the imagery and vocabulary of sacrifice became a main referent in print-media representations, in forms of violent action, and in talk on the streets. This alone is nothing unusual, for all modern nationalist rhetoric relies on sacrificial invocations and imageries (Anderson 1991: 11; Marvin and Ingle 1999: 63–97; Eghigian and Berg 2002). India poses no exception to this fact (Jaffrelot 2003 [1994]). What is specific to India, however, and this is the second level, is that the identification of ethnic and religious differences between Hindus and Muslims was primarily established through reference to diet and styles of worship, further appealing to the domains of animal slaughter and religious sacrifice. In the cultural history of Gujarat, these levels are intimately connected to notions of ahimsa. Third, political and civic actors treated the pogrom as a reactive ritual mechanism—*pratikriya*, a form of automatic sacrificial retribution.

#### AGGREGATION, STEREOTYPE, AND AFFECT

In a national register, “Hindus” and “Muslims” tend to be understood as categories of population. Yet the divisions within and between respective religious communities, and the way citizens apprehend these divisions in quotidian life, still play out on the level not of society (*Gesellschaft*) but of community (*Gemeinschaft*). Gujaratis are aware that terms like “Hindu” and “Muslim” are synthetic. These categories relate only abstractly to their lived realities. There is not one Muslim community in Gujarat but many, as there are many diverse Hindu, Jain, Dalit (Harijan), and Adivasi (tribal) communities. A complex pattern of differentiations and symbolic gradations of status and attribute structure this agglomeration of groups.

The kind of social struggles that many subaltern communities face are often about the meaning of and legitimate membership in abstract aggregate categories of population. A specific Gujarati subaltern community might struggle to be recognized as a full Muslim community, while the same holds true for communities in relationship to the Hindu category.

Furthermore, socioeconomic class and individual difference always inflect local considerations, the latter frequently in direct opposition to group dynamics. Thus it is not uncommon to find amicable relations between neighbors despite massive mobilization and propaganda at higher levels of abstract membership in opposed aggregate categories.

Aggregate categories tend to eviscerate empirical differences while creating new orders that focus and reconfigure these. In times of violence and generalized anxiety, this erasure is particularly palpable and constitutes political power for those able to manipulate these categories. The emptier and more abstract a category, the more vociferously it can be inhabited—or projected—in order to garner the substance it lacks. In Gujarat, *Hindutva*, which literally means the “essence of the Hindu,” serves the purpose of aggregation.

Residents of Ahmedabad sometimes say “*mane hindutva ave chhe*” or “*mane hindutva thai chhe*,” which loosely translates as “Hindutva rises up in me” or “Hindutva is happening to me.” They locate a visceral sentiment or affect, which can spontaneously arise in them, as an authentic expression of Hindu-ness. Here, it describes an awakening of something sleeping deep within the subject—a surging essence that can be brought to the surface—Hindutva organizes and shapes this amorphous surge into an aggregate political subject and thus holds the key to contemporary mass politics in the state.

Once Hindu is invoked as essence, pregnant emotionally but emptied of much content, the figure of the Muslim may arouse a phantasmagoria of fear, anger, visceral abhorrence, and particularly disgust. Much fear appears to come from the imagined trope of the Muslim as criminal and terrorist in alignment with the archenemy Pakistan. Such a figure calls for heightened security measures, including delegation of violent labor to nongovernmental organizations like the VHP, the RSS, or the Bajrang Dal. More momentous, however, is the figure of the Muslim as carrier of revulsion and abjection, which frames experiences that index traditional practices of untouchability in the contemporary imagination.

Stereotypes based on clichés are relatively enduring symbolic forms that can be studied in space and time. Their present sociopolitical mobilization through “awakening” gives them a spontaneous thrust and direction that has been underestimated in analyses of violence in India. The pervasiveness of the image of awakening as well as the experience of becoming present to an essence has much to do with the mythical unity that aggregate identity concepts such as “Hindu” can invoke by ideally bridging class, caste, religious, and sectarian separation. It appears to overcome social division and allows for the idea of a unified Hindu people to emerge as a sovereign entity and historical subject. In a democratic polity

governed by the rule of law, however, legal provisions guarantee protection of minorities against the tyranny of the majority. They are supposed to regulate and even control agonistic popular expressions of unity.

Such limitations may, in turn, lead to defiance and resistance to law. Such defiance is an integral strategy employed by many Hindutva leaders. In 2002, Chief Minister Narendra Modi himself did everything he could to affirm the legitimacy of the tide against the Muslim minority. At the level of the street, circulating stereotypes filled out the emptiness of this mobilized, politicized “Hindu,” who had become present to himself with materials that invoke cultural forms conceived of as “traditional,” in both vernacular idioms and conceptions of ritual purity.

In the context of the pogrom, stereotyping of the familiar neighborhood Muslim was important in order to confirm stigmatizations that were often at odds with empirical reality. Yet stereotypes are always generative and creative. As Herzfeld (1992: 71–97, esp. 72) has argued, they render intimate the abstraction of otherness, which constitutes an important signature of nationalist identification.

This study examines the relation of Hindu stereotypes of Muslims to the consumption and production of meat in concrete quotidian practices and conceptions of diet and worship: meat eating, vegetarianism, and the rejection of animal sacrifice. While the origin and operation of these stereotypes is diverse, during the pogrom they became unified and effective to produce a collective imaginary. This relation carries the power to arouse the affect of disgust and can produce the most pronounced sentiments of moral indignation including even physical experiences of nausea and collapse. Disgust for a substance and, by extension, for those associated with it does not, however, engender stable representations; on the contrary, it collapses distinctions and culminates in intimate experiences and proximity to the subject of stigmatization.

In this way, individual Gujaratis participated in the violence in ways that made it hard for them to later maintain emotional distance from these events. This fact had momentous consequences in the political developments in the state. References in the media, in everyday conversations, and among political actors to meat consumption, butchering, and bodily mutilation played a major role in Gujarati imaginaries leading to and accompanying the pogrom.

The middle to lower classes maintain a routine division of labor to Hindu nationalist organizations. Even when financially supported, organizations such as RSS, VHP, and Bajrang Dal are often derided and viewed with skeptic detachment in calm times. But it is through the sophisticated institutional scaffolding of these organizations that the *krodh hindu*—the angry Hindu—emerges on stage to allow individual residents to realize the possibilities of a belligerent nationalist posture (Makawana

2002: 11–17). Anger is mustered most easily through narratives of betrayal employing the rival sibling Pakistan. To be sure, this line of association may seem overly simplistic, but national divisions are minutely projected into many city areas through designations such as “mini-Pakistan” and “mini-Hindustan.”

At the same time, Gujarat is the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi and strongly self-identified with the doctrine of ahimsa (nonviolence), which he deployed so effectively in the fight for Indian Independence from the British. Despite Gandhi’s current unpopularity in Gujarat, it is wrong to assume that his particular interpretation of ahimsa has simply been discarded. The levels of reception are more nuanced. Many people in Gujarat cannot avoid being addressed by ahimsa’s lofty ethical claims, and the figure of Gandhi himself remained a contentious reference point even at the height of violence. Loyalty to Hindutva, and the reaction it calls for, however, appears at odds with the address of ahimsa. It is through ahimsa in its many forms that a relay between nationalist ideology and regional pride is constructed.

The contradictory nature of this identification, an ego ideal sated by identification with ahimsa and a political project pregnant with resentment against minorities, broke to the surface, with particular virulence, in the pogrom. Even after its successful engineering, a bedazzled middle class, hesitating while evidently in awe about their own extra-legal possibilities, continued to insist on the nonviolent credentials of their province. This work takes these assertions seriously and, following the spirit of work by Lobo and Das (2006: 41–62), Pandey (2006: 13), and Kumar (2009: 37), places these issues of self-identification at the center of analysis.<sup>5</sup>

Understanding the paradox of how ahimsa, understood as a doctrine of nonviolence, becomes implicated in the production of the very violence it renounces is the central puzzle of the Gujarat pogrom. How is the address of ahimsa reconciled with aggressive nationalist posturing? How are traditional forms of inner-worldly renunciation transformed, specifically informing vegetarian dietary practices, under contemporary demands for political mobilization and ethnic-religious identification?

#### AHIMSA, VULNERABILITY, AND ANGER

The doctrine of ahimsa is more than a salient ideal in Gujarat. It is also a concrete practice, closely associated with forms of traditional worship and diet, specifically vegetarianism and the rejection of animal blood sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> The ongoing disappearance of animal blood sacrifice is an all-India phenomenon (Fuller 1992: 83–105). Distinctive in Gujarat, however, is

how the consolidation of high-caste political dominance makes ahimsa, cow protection, and vegetarianism difficult to distinguish conceptually. The influential merchant communities of Jains and Hindu Vaishnavas (Vaniya), as well as dominant groups like the Patel community, think of themselves as vegetarian, on the face of it, as do all other dominant Hindu sects and movements largely financed by them, such as the Swaminarayan *sampradaya* (A. M. Shah and Shroff 1958; Pocock 1973: 41–80, 81, 122–157, 164–171; Tambs-Lyche 1997: 224–232).

The opposition to animal sacrifice is attested for a long time in the region. Already in the twelfth century, the Caulukya dynasty patronized Jain elites who played a paramount role in their unwavering opposition to royal sacrifices. With the decline of Caulukyias, the royal Shaiva cult, which included animal sacrifices diminished, while the influence of Vaishnava worship styles grew. Shakta practices nonetheless continued among pastoralists and other groups apparently for a long time (Sheikh 2010: 115, 129–184). Medieval Gujarat was characterized by the complex interaction between merchants and rulers, the latter of whom were mostly from pastoral background and propitiated Mother Goddesses with animal sacrifices. In the sixteenth century, claims to ahimsa feature supremely in Vaishnava conversion of pastoral communities to vegetarianism and abolition of animal blood sacrifice in the context of Mother Goddess worship (Clémentin-Ojha 2003 [1994]: 127–142). It seems, however, that these practices even then continued to coexist with those considered nonviolent in Gujarat (*ibid.*: 140).

The complementary cultural styles between traders and pastoralists and their religious institutions have partly survived into the present (Tambs-Lyche 1997: 224–255, 96–120). The conversion of Goddesses to vegetarianism instead of the patronizing of temples through caste and clan associations is an ongoing process in the regional integration of Gujarat state (Ibrahim 2009: 163–175; Sheikh 2010: 84–99; Tambs-Lyche 2010: 109–111). By the nineteenth century, Alexander Forbes (1924 [1878]: 324) mentioned ritual animal sacrifices in at the shrine of Ambaji Mata, nowadays Gujarat's patron Goddess. Such allusions are today unfathomable. Proper Gujarati-ness in the present is defined by the inheritance of an unambiguous vegetarian ethos from a Hindu past.

Mahatma Gandhi pointedly described the severity of the vegetarian atmosphere during his childhood in the late nineteenth century: “The opposition to and abhorrence of meat eating that existed in Gujarat among the Jains and Vaishnavas were to be seen nowhere else in India or outside in such strength” (1927: 18). In the following years, in organizing the struggle for independence from colonial rule, Gandhi appealed to ahimsa as a political method for grassroots mobilization (Spodek 1971: 361–372; 1989: 765–795; Bondurant 1988 [1958]: 23–29, 105–145).

Much of Gandhi's political success was predicated on the upwardly mobile Patel segment among his Gujarati followers, with whom he shared a strong vegetarian ethos.

The trend towards "unequivocal vegetarianism" (Pocock 1973: 81) among the Patel and other groups in Gujarat, and the abolition of all blood sacrifice, is pervasively documented in the ethnographic literature of the region (Westphal-Hellbusch and Westphal 1976a: 176; 1976b: 88–89, 175–179; Goody 1982: 114–127, esp. 124; Hardiman 1995 [1987]: 18–67; Randeria 1989: 183; A. M. Shah 2002b: 59–66; Basu 2004b: 19; Ghassem-Fachandi 2008: 120–125; Ibrahim 2009: 163–181; Simpson 2008: 91–111).

The new twist in this development, however, is the clever and systematic politicization of vegetarianism in the context of Hindu nationalist activities that are often more astute and culturally attentive than they are credited for. Vegetarianism as an "ahimsa austerity" (Bayly 2001 [1999]: 218) enters into the psychologically very complex relation between communities mediated by the aggregates "Hindu" and "Muslim" along with the "Indian nation." It is complex because this relation does not simply imply a dietary stigma attached to Muslims but adumbrates the historical distinction between merchant and warrior communities as well as between upper and lower castes, Hindu and non-Hindu. Throughout South Asia in the last half century, such transformations of social distinctions of class and caste into national oppositions have been accompanied by comparable transformations in personhood. This study analyzes only the contemporary manifestation of these transformations.<sup>7</sup>

Several ethnographers in Gujarat and adjacent states have pointed out that the opposition between vegetarianism and nonvegetarianism did not spell automatic conflict in the past—nor does it do so automatically today. Forms of value relativity, modern practices of consumption, caste complementarity, and a division of roles secured a working relationship in many contexts between strictly vegetarian communities and those that did not hold to such views or follow such practices (Pocock 1973: 81–93; Babb 2004: 225–235). Yet the reductive inscription of "ahimsa austerity" into the depths of Gujarati cultural history suggests that a sense of vulnerability underlies contemporary assertions of regional pride.

The answer to this vulnerability is the angry Hindu. The *krodh hindu* in Gujarat stands in a relation to the common stereotype of the weak effeminate Gujarati Hindu, who propounds ahimsa (nonviolence), mis-conceived not only as a cultural quality of traditional society but as the very cause for passivity of the common citizen in the present. The binary between weak vegetarian and brazen meat-eating Hindu became exacerbated during the colonial encounter (Nandy 1998b: 1–63). In their administrative classificatory practices in the nineteenth century, British

officials picked up such differences and pragmatically distinguished between so-called martial races and nonmartial groups—a distinction that continues to have collective psychological effects in the present.

Today the pronounced feeling of emasculation among former colonial subjects has much to do with this transformation of precolonial conversion to the colonial and modern emphasis on martial prowess and masculinity. A glorious Gujarati past suffused with ahimsa brings forth the angry Hindu, who becomes, for many, the answer to the nonviolent Hindu's castration. According to this logic, adherence to a position of nonviolent renunciation renders the acts of the Hindu as historical subject ineffectual. The same argument is made when trying to explain how the state of Gujarat could have fallen so easily to the onslaught of Islam in the early medieval period.

An early example for how nonviolence is translated into Gujarati regional vulnerability can be found in a standard work of Gujarati historiography published shortly after the founding of the new state. M. R. Majumdar, in his *Cultural History of Gujarat*, remarks in a footnote: "Jainism with its insistence on non-violence, and Buddhism, with its clarion-call to renunciation, combined to create an atmosphere in which patriotism and the martial virtues withered and dropped—naturally" (1965: 106, n. 30). This view concurs with Savarkar's (2005 [1928]: 18–24) exhortations on ancient Indian history more than forty years earlier. When elaborating on the fall of Buddhism, Savarkar expounded on the deleterious effect that "Buddhistic power" had on ancient India, including on its "national virility" (ibid.: 18). Against the political influence and vibrancy of Gandhi's anticolonial methodologies, Savarkar painted an ancient Buddhism filled with enlightened unconcern and "mealy-mouthed formulas of Ahimsa" (ibid.: 19). Ahimsa, together with Buddhist universalism, was an "opiate" that eventually spelled catastrophe allowing sin and crime, as well as foreign invasion, to penetrate the vulnerable nation.

The Hindu awoken in anger takes charge of his or her own destiny by either individually assuming the right to mete out violence, or alternatively, through varied forms of complicity and delegation to authority (Bourdieu 1991: 203–219). There exists today a profound blurring between the excessive expenditure of consumption and the excess of violence that, in the pogrom, became metaphorically linked. Examining the collective mobilization for the pogrom as a diagnostic event allows us to catch a glimpse of the mythical unity that religious nationalism tries to invoke by referencing its absence as a Hindu lack that needs to be overcome (Hansen 1999: 77–83). In what follows, I will argue that the affect of disgust for meat is an expression of this sensitivity that has become conceived as indicator of the quality of nonviolence itself. Disgust, more-

over, while immediately invoking notions of purity and pollution, allows for a new form of identification with the doctrine of nonviolence. In this way, nonviolent renunciation whose essence is disgust becomes itself an integral aspect of the legitimization of violence against Muslims.

## MEAT AND DISGUST

In Gujarat, meat is not an indifferent substance, but one much alive through a plethora of meanings that inform an array of unique behaviors and reactions. The powerful capacity of meat to signify has been recorded by ethnographers of South Asia in diverse settings (Osella and Osella 2008). The quotidian classification of communities on the basis of vegetarian and nonvegetarian food habits is perhaps the most obvious and immediate expression of this fact. What different communities consume is a common subject of discussion and of much chatter, sometimes benign and sometimes not. I have witnessed and participated in such discussions many times. In urban contexts throughout South Asia this salience is connected to particular shifts from caste-based to class-based socialities without canceling the sociological importance of the former (for Kathmandu, e.g. Liechty 2005: esp. 3).

Besides chatter, idioms, gestures, and facial mimics reference meat consumption. Villagers in rural areas of central Gujarat often substitute a typical cutting gesture with a hand when alluding to the act of procuring, butchering, and eating meat while refraining from uttering these acts in speech. Vegetarianism is a widespread dietary practice not merely among upper-caste Hindus but among lower orders, too (Goody 1982: 114–127; Westphal-Hellbusch and Westphal 1976a: 176; 1976b: 88–89, 175–179). It can include Muslim saints (*Pir*) of local shrines, who are sometimes hailed as vegetarian and celibate by their followers, including Hindu communities (Ghassem-Fachandi 2008: 120–126).

In sum, meat is a highly communicative substance in Gujarat connected to a vast array of practices and conceptions that await ethnographic inquiry in diverse settings. It is an overdetermined substance, powerful precisely because it enters into multiple relationships between and among members and sections of society that are exactly *not* Muslim. The Muslim minority community as carrier of disgust for meat is not simply a stable traditional stereotype, part of a series of symbolic and metaphorical contents. Rather the identification of the Muslim meat-eater is a form of *practical expiation*, insofar as the figure of the Muslim comes to stand for all those vices that many are incapable of renouncing on the one hand, and that are associated with meat consumption on the

other. Muslims are made to stand openly for what many others do anyway more clandestinely, or find various alternative contexts to engage in. In this moral economy of food substances, disgust is a defense against the appeal of lurking transgressive possibilities that meat signifies, and the disgusted reaction is habitually portrayed as a form of religious authenticity and dietary innocuousness.

The development towards vegetarian food ethics and nonviolent worship practice remains fundamentally fraught with inconsistencies. On the one hand, vegetarianism becomes challenged and at times eclipsed by modern forms of consumption in urban restaurants and food stalls. Moreover, blood sacrifices reappear or continue as more or less secret and criminal practice in many places in Gujarat. Its salience has only become more pronounced, either as “magical superstition”—anachronistic remnants of a misunderstood ritual past—or in communal provocations between Hindus and Muslims. Questions of slaughter and carnivorous diet dominate stereotypes and accusations against minorities, especially Muslims. Hindutva ideology, in turn, has dismissed the moral basis of strict vegetarianism, ahimsa, which it has held responsible for Hindu weakness in the past and in the present. On the other hand, vegetarianism skillfully buttresses a discourse of pronounced stigmatization of Muslims in the state inclusive of the aforementioned allusions. The application of an artificially ritualistic and nationalist language by organizations propounding Hindutva owes much of its appeal to sacrificial registers.

It is tempting to see discontinuities between concepts such as ahimsa and vegetarian practices, modern meat consumption and notions of animal sacrifice, ancient ritual forms and Hindu nationalist rituals, Vaishnava and Jaina conceptions, and so on. A focus on such discontinuities risks missing, however, what this study is at pains to elucidate: namely, how disparate units of thought and practice can become part of a collective imaginary whose expression remains opaque to a logic of scholarly investigation that stresses continuity or discontinuity in the systematic arrangement of the objects of study. When employed during a pogrom, and combined with other elements, these units are not easily made congruent with an ideal scholarly coherence. Taking this limitation seriously carries important methodological implications to which I will turn now.

## METHOD

This study differs from a history, or a political science or sociological account, in that it is the work of an ethnographer who was also witness to the violent events under investigation. By “witness” I do not mean to say

that because of proximity I know things better, and with “ethnographer” I do not wish to invoke a superior epistemology to other forms of knowing. My intent here is to stress the particularity of intersubjective insight generated by long-term field research. The intellectual questions in this study are profoundly inflected by the way I was made to participate in the pogrom as an event, its quotidian representations, smells, images, and sounds. Certainly such participation can also limit insight by leaving me too intimately entangled in my own experience of the pogrom.

During the numbing weeks of violence, I lived with two young men, both Hindus and complicit in different ways in the events. My discussions with them and their peers were important for refining many of the insights that I present in this study. At the same time, I interacted daily with a wide array of city residents of middle- to lower-middle-class background, some of whom I met accidentally while exploring neighborhoods and some of whom I met through my association with three institutions of higher education: Gujarat University, Gujarat Vidhyapit, and M. S. Baroda University. In the middle stage of fieldwork, acting on the urgent advice of friends and neighbors (my name identified me as Muslim), I moved to a Muslim area of the city, where I lived in a housing society for another seven months.

Although I discussed events with a wide range of people over the years, my insights during my field stays came mostly from serendipitous encounters that congealed into closer and long-term personal relationships. I had not prepared for this contingency beforehand. In this book I have selected for illustration exemplary cases of perspectives on and into the Gujarat pogrom; they do not create a rounded, closed, and finished narrative. Instead they are, in part, intended to unsettle top-down paradigms of thinking about this particular violence, and hopefully, for violence in India more generally. I found glaring confirmation of an old ethnographic suspicion, namely that more intimate relationships allow for unguarded statements, and the unique opportunity to revisit such statements later on. It is through interpersonal dynamics that I came to take seriously what I consider to be unconscious material—spontaneous statements, confusing locutions, slips of the tongue, unexpected jokes, dreamlike stories—which is usually successfully censored in the exchanges of formal interviews.

During the height of the violence, and for a long time afterwards, not all interlocutors were comfortable with my questions, and they deployed diverse strategies when confronted with more or less subtle queries. Many made a distinction between information that should be openly relayed and other forms of communication with me that had no place in official narratives. A few interlocutors went so far as to literally perform

as a different persona in a discussion, without making explicit why they were doing this. I interpreted such moments as attempts to please my demand for engagement and yet dodge the pressure for disclosure or judgment, which I inevitably came to represent. What the recorder and the notebook demanded was performed with a sly conspiratorial smile, which could be disclaimed afterwards when the interview was finished and an even more momentous discussion began. It was as if the formal relay of information could be mediated, and the truth told, through a shift in registers.

The authority of this study, then, rests largely on classic participant observation, living intimately with the people studied, refined by event analysis, where the pogrom is used as a diagnostic occasion, inclusive of the media analysis with which it is inextricably linked. In the field, I also conducted narrative and focused thematic interviews, and I collected life histories as well as written accounts of the same events by local actors and other academics both during and after research. I used these written accounts primarily to corroborate, fill in, or delimit my own observations.

I used a notebook, tape, and mini-disk recorder selectively, whenever practical and interlocutors felt comfortable with the use. During the chaotic months of violence and the tense atmosphere in its immediate aftermath, life-history work and my attempts to shine a light on the present through inquiries into the biographical past grounded to a halt. Discussions of the past drifted unalterably into present events. Nonetheless, some biographic material has been included in the present analysis.

Insights about the pogrom are linked to a description and analysis of urban space in Ahmedabad, Gujarat's largest city and the main stage of the violence. Drawing out these connections adds insight to further fields of inquiry: how the city is undergoing fast and profound changes, and how the spatial experience of the city in the period 2001–2003 points to oscillations between intimacy and separation in both material and ideational domains. Through a complicated array of sensitive areas, bridges, roadside temples, permanent police posts, and magical remainders of expiation rituals at traffic intersections and plazas, the urban landscape participated in the experience of division. As I lived in five different residences over the course of several periods of fieldwork, my own residential experiences index some of the varied social geographies of violence.

Finally, this study draws on only part of my broader research; it focuses mainly on the perpetrators or those identifying with them and not on the victims of the pogrom. This focus is the result of a decision made in the course of my analysis after the events, namely that my theoretical and empirical contribution about the nature of the pogrom, sacrifice, and ahimsa would be greater if I narrowed it to complicity rather than also included the loss of agency of the victims.

## SYMMETRY AND SECONDARY REVISION

Epistemologically, this study tries to remain true to the ethnographic encounters from which it draws its primary insights, and in this does not try to account for the particular forms of violence in Gujarat with a general explanatory model or theory of violence. Instead, what it tries to achieve is an arrest of perception of the pogrom by drawing attention to some singular instances of violence and complicity where a deeper instead of a more general understanding seems promising.

The diverse approaches of historians, political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, activists, and legal experts have contributed to a growing literature on Gujarat that now offers specific explanations of many phenomena related to the pogrom: political advances of the BJP, Hindu activism, governance failure, electoral violence, Gujarati pride and subnationalism, the surge of Hindu nationalist ideology, the dynamics of gender and sexuality, global financing of ethnic violence, and class struggle. This study, by contrast, is ethnographically limited in space and time, necessarily partial in the sense of being written from a particular perspective, and inherently incomplete by initial design. What this approach hopes to avoid is the compulsion to make the widely diverse and inassimilable responses that I witnessed in the field retroactively fit the questions that I initially asked. To avoid secondary revision of this sort means that I am apprehensive of establishing too exact a symmetry between question and answer, that is, I am wary of what often goes by the name of “explanation.”

That said, I am neither dismissive at attempts to explain, nor immune to the argumentative appeal of an explanation. But I am critical of interpretative closures *where an important question is laid to rest by a seemingly comprehensive answer*. The perspective of ethnographic fieldwork very rarely allows for a form of closure that pretends to have gotten to the bottom of things (Geertz 1973: 29). Instead, the answers it finds most often splinter the discursive demand that engendered the initial set of questions in the first place. Thus, instead of rendering particularities into the generalities of recognizable causality, it might be better to defer the desire to explain and risk a detour through *Verstehen* (understanding) in the tradition of Georg Simmel (1972 [1918]: 77–99, esp. 98) or the Weberian tradition followed by Clifford Geertz (1973: 15). Both placed, in different ways, emphasis on the act of fashioning an understanding and thus stressed the creativity in the act of interpretation. Anthropological accounts that derive their insights from field experiences allow for such a detour. I elaborate in more detail in the last chapter where that approach leaves me in relation to other interpretations of the Gujarat pogrom and alternative events.

There are at least two reasons for this disclaimer—one disciplinary and methodological, the other personal and existential—that are moreover inextricably linked. I want to outline them briefly here. An ethnographer engaged in the sort of field research I engaged in cannot pretend to be a technician of the empirical. There is no prefigured scientific casuistry of life during a pogrom that I could have applied to organize this inquiry. I did not and likely could not have anticipated the data I collected beforehand; nor do these data necessarily allow easy integration into meta-narratives of, for example, India, violence, and postcolonialism that are readily available. The more closely one listens to a speaker, the more difficult it is to construct elegant plausibility structures that satisfy the demand for representation and replication in which colleagues of other disciplines can recognize themselves or feel affirmed in their own arduous approaches. Instead of identifying this lack of congruence as a form of defect, I suggest that consideration of insights beyond what is assimilable to meta-narratives and commentaries is ultimately valuable. I see the productive role of anthropology among the disciplines precisely to the degree that it resists taming ethnographic insights to retrofit and conform to knowledge projects of other disciplines. I want to avoid the currently very common practice of relegating ethnography to a position of anecdotal supplement authorizing larger theoretical-historical claims (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009: 1–24)

Interdisciplinarity is not automatically or necessarily a sign of epistemological maturity. It often enough expresses a lack of understanding about what a particular discipline and its method might actually allow for. Thus I prefer an ethnographic focus not out of epistemological rigidity, especially since it concerns the unpredictability of field research, but rather because it provides a possibility to acknowledge a reality that remained surprising and indifferent to my academic understandings and my bias toward coherence. It goes without saying that such an approach can never allow itself to renounce reflexivity and a concern for what it does not grasp.

But while it is one thing to assert reflexivity theoretically, it is another to provide it practically. In my view, reflexivity is not achieved by abstractly invoking theories that critique the metaphysics of presence, the discursive production of scientific objects, the nexus of knowledge and power, or any other such assertions, as profound and legitimate as they may be. Foregrounding them risks drowning reflexivity in mere academic posture. Instead, the most significant reflexive gesture for an ethnographic author consists in providing a description for which one must assume responsibility. This description must be such that others can follow, appropriate, reinterpret, or disagree with it. In short, true reflexivity is achieved

through the confrontation with the critical reader, who completes the text and has the opportunity to disagree with the author's production. Reflexivity is thus a relation that occurs between an author, a reader, and a text, not reducible to declarations of intent in an introduction.

Even if I were not an anthropologist with an ethnographic agenda, I would find it difficult to remain silent about the Gujarat pogrom. During the darkest days of the pogrom I was not simply a researcher but a trembling witness and puzzled bystander, a participant in events that far surpassed any professional preparation or expectation. The fact that I cannot provide but an intervention into the analysis of the pogrom has much to do with the severity of the events experienced in 2002. Ethnography seen in this light does more than produce authoritative knowledge about an object of study, be it "culture" or a historical event such as a pogrom. It includes within its descriptions a suspicion about the process of secondary revision that certain types of knowledge production implicitly encourage.

It does this by systematically privileging considerations of intelligibility deeply at odds with the realities of social phenomena and subjective experiences in question—especially that of violent events. I am wary here because the desire to comprehensively explain can indicate both a premature impulse towards intellectual closure on the one hand and the provision of a blueprint for possible instrumental engineering on the other. Sometimes it might be preferable to steer towards but never to arrive at a comprehensive picture. I, for one, have made peace with that admittedly frustrating fact.

## DESCRIPTION

If we eschew certain forms of explanation due to epistemological considerations and privilege *Verstehen*, where does this leave us in relation to description? Describing violence—scenes, acts, and imaginations—is a difficult task. The more an author takes seriously what and how a particular violent act speaks, the more he or she risks sliding into a form of pornography. Dealing too closely with varied forms of destruction can have the contaminating effect of damaging the author's moral integrity in the eyes of the reader. Evocative material collected during violent events remains redolent when recorded and written up in an account, and again when presented to an audience. Observing violence is equally precarious. Especially in the context of collective violence, the crowd frequently understands itself to be on stage, and individuals perform part of their actions for that audience: bystanders, reporters, the occasional ethnogra-

pher. I would hope that the more reflexive consideration of violent acts and their representation in this book might mitigate some of these problems (Ghassem-Fachandi 2009: 1–14).

In the hollow media discourses on ethnic conflict in India, as well as in some scholarly writings, violence is examined merely for its cause and outcome: who is responsible, how many killed, how much destroyed? The accomplishments of violent exploits are then related to political gain and *voilà*—there we have an explanation of violence. The violent act itself, including its idiomatic expressions and imaginations, especially at the moment it is meted out, remains unexplored, as if it were self-explanatory. Violent acts and thoughts, however, have structure, intent, and form. Conceptualized as cleansing pollution, purifying spaces, desecrating bodies, or profaning objects, such acts can articulate content that is meaningfully related to perceived qualities of groups that are assaulted in ritual dramas (Davis 1973: esp. 59–63). Preceded by anticipation, projection, and hallucinations that provide blueprints for enactment, they are followed by narratives, images, or memories that keep the deeds alive.

Finally, although this book focuses on Hindu Gujaratis, I invested an equal amount of research on Muslims. In my experience, Muslims in Gujarat think and act in most respects like other Gujaratis. I have, therefore, no reason whatsoever to conclude that they are less prone to violence or that the same social and psychological dynamics that led to massive violent mobilization among Hindus are absent among Muslims. However, this book deals with an empirical event in which Muslims were the explicit targets. Muslims in Gujarat did not call the shots in 2002, nor do they today. The event here is a pogrom, and the focus is on those in whose name the violence was perpetrated. That, in this case, is the aggregate category of the Hindu people or the Hindu nation, and my interest is primarily to account for and understand the social facts of an empirical event.

Identifying cultural motivations in people's conceptions and violent actions, as I do, does not mean I attribute some form of causality to "culture" or that I displace agency onto religious or symbolic forms. My assumptions are that actors are never fully conscious of their own motivations and that actions are always socially informed, influenced by schemas of which actors likely cannot make themselves aware. I begin, therefore, with what people utter unself-consciously, what they read, what movies they see, and how they act during the actual violence. As initial statements and behaviors tend to be puzzling, many analysts ignore or dismiss them and instead move immediately to a more abstract level of analysis, or they focus solely on the public statements of political actors without attempting to understand what people perceive and apprehend. It is my experience that within a couple of years of the violence, many local

actors themselves tend to deny their own statements made or actions during the pogrom. Accounting for such disavowal after the fact can lead to a deeper understanding of the motivations during the initial violence.

Along these lines, I am also not arguing that vegetarianism itself, as an ideology or set of cultural practices, causes ethnic violence, or that a tradition of sacrifice, for that matter, or a doctrine of nonviolence makes a people act more or less aggressively. But if actors invoke meat eating, use sacrificial vocabulary, and invoke nonviolence, the analyst must take their statements seriously—minimally as explicit forms of rationalization allowing other things to remain unstated. A decade ago, Jonathan Spencer (1990b) pointed to a homology between nationalist thought and the discipline of anthropology, as both are in the business of interpreting cultural expression. Our response to this unsettling affinity cannot be to reject the culture concept or to ignore its local appeal. Such a response is, in fact, irresponsible, as it conveniently absolves the anthropologist from owning his or her own disciplinary history, distancing instead of assuming responsibility.

To be attentive to what people say, what they choose to reveal or inadvertently omit, and how they experience an event demands attentiveness to things that cover much more than what actors are able or willing to express in word or deed. The analysis of identification, affect, and emotion and of the content of idioms and opinions must include the consideration of that which remains unspoken, of that which goes without saying, or of that which remains unconscious—often enough not only to the native but also to the ethnographer him- or herself.

## FIRST ENCOUNTER

My first travel to India in late 1995 brought me to a village in north Gujarat where, for approximately four months, I explored interactions and exchanges between living Muslim saints at a shrine and their devotees and followers—including many Hindus (Ghassem-Fachandi 2008). Despite all apparent concord between diverse categories of village residents, primarily Hindus and Muslims, I experienced an occurrence that foreshadowed much of what I was to encounter in years to come. At the time I did not entirely grasp the significance of this episode.

One day I was told to avoid a local pond that had dried out, just a mile outside the village in which I lived. A ghost was present there, and it would be dangerous to encounter the wrathful spirit. Then, a young Hindu man from a neighboring village took me aside and, as if to convince me that not rearward superstition but real events were at work, explained that a few years earlier an unmarried Hindu woman had been

raped and killed by a Muslim man in that village. Consequently, the entire Muslim community of that village was forced to relocate to a nearby town. The young man even took me to his village and showed me the ruins. Meanwhile, the angry spirit of the murdered woman continued to haunt the local pond—the alleged site of the crime.

When other villagers discovered that this young man had related the incident to me unsolicited, they severely reprimanded him. The religious authorities of the village I lived in, Hindu and Muslim alike, went out of their way to cast doubt on the young man's character. They said he was corrupt and had a loose morality. They advised me not to trust anything he said. From then on, it proved impossible for me to meet him without the risk of affronting my hosts, who forbade me from visiting the abandoned and destroyed Muslim houses of the neighboring village. Intimidated by these severe reactions, and not wanting to cause the man any further tribulation, I put this event out of my mind.

And yet it came back. I can see now that the village authorities tried to prevent a curious foreigner from causing unintended trouble by stirring up a sensitive subject. Their reaction was a defense against my perhaps overly inquisitive and insensitive advances. But the incident also reveals a more general uncertainty pervading such intimate local issues. Though out of my mind temporarily, the incident had not been relegated to the past, it had not disappeared or been forgotten with the departure of the Muslims of the neighboring village or with mine from the field site. Villagers were afraid, and legitimately so, that the whole matter could blow up at any moment, all over again. Something had not been resolved, and the female ghost was the immaterial proof of an enduring presence.

Eight years after my initial encounter, I spoke with some of the Muslims involved and came to appreciate the precarious status of this incident. They denied the crime and blamed the family of the girl for the murder. She was killed, they claimed, because she had had an amorous affair with a local Muslim boy—not a unique occurrence in Gujarat. What in one version of the story had been an act of intercommunal rape and murder had, in another version, metamorphosed into a case of intrafamilial honor killing. Whatever occurred between the two ill-fated individuals, the incident adumbrates the intricate nature of a wounded relationship. I will return to this episode in chapter 2.

In both versions, the woman stands at the center of all deliberations, yet without any voice. In fact, as a murder victim, she finds herself completely bereft of any agency. As she is a ghost, her presence is merely spectral. Her predicament is caused by a problem of desire, either by her unacceptable inclination or by an unwanted desire for her. While her desire for a Muslim man is unpalatable, so is the desire of a Muslim man for a Hindu woman.

This incident exemplifies how communal conflict in India creates women as spectral, which on the one hand places them at the apex of sacred things but on the other hand dispossesses them of any agency. Communication, the exchange of facts and perspectives, has become splintered and continuously risks reentering discourse as rumor, fomenting the violence that I was attempting to understand. Accusations, whatever their initial truth, are often indistinguishable from mere suspicions and, when circulated, frequently resemble superstitions. I will say more about this in the pages to come.

During the pogrom of 2002, this particular village remained peaceful. When things threatened to get out of hand, the local Hindu swami and the local Muslim pir acted promptly and performed collectively a *bhumi puja* (a worship ritual of the earth) in the main village square. The religious authorities thus obligated the residents to keep the peace. Such strategies to resist the temptation of violence can be found in other parts of Gujarat, too. And yet, unfortunately, they frequently fail.